

AN ELEGY WRITTEN IN RICHMOND



PS 8526
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E43
1917
c.2

BY
D. M. MATHESON
EX-PRINCIPAL ALEXANDER McKAY SCHOOL
HALIFAX, N. S.



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I

Low in the eastern sky the breaking light
Pales in the vault of heaven the morning star,
Presaging me the dying hour of night,
And that the twilight gray is not afar;

II

For night is slowly changing into morn,
And through the gloom the forms of ships appear.
Across the Arm below, the bugle horn
Reveille's call brings to my listening ear.

III

No other sound is on the morning air
To echo back from hills and dales around;
No home has man; no beast has here his lair,
And desolation seems to own the ground;

IV

Save me who sit beneath an aged elm
Which some one's home at Richmond once did
 grace,
Ere fell misfortune did it overwhelm
And left this tree alone to mark the place.

V

Yet here I am beneath this hoary tree
And ruminate upon the recent past—
If such events again should hap to be—
The ruins round their gloomy bodings cast.

4

VI

But still I sit amidst these scenes of death
Which call to mind that dire December day,
When Fate unkindly blew his blighting breath,
Reducing homes to dust, and men, to clay.

VII

And question thus: "Was there no law amiss?
Had no officials power to prevent
A devastation, dark and drear, as this?
Was Richmond's loss naught but an accident?"

VIII

And in my breast a rising hate I feel
For man-made Laws which all protect the High
And leave the Low their grievous wounds to heal
And bear their load of sorrow till they die.

IX

A sense of sadness passes through my soul,
An earthly grief akin to human-kind,
But ere this sorrow sad doth reach its goal
Celestial musings fill my troubled mind.

X

The hatred lately felt within my breast
And which I vainly thought naught could allay
Until my spirit passed to its last rest;
I surely find is speeding fast away.

XI

Some Spirit sweet seems near me to abide
Who doth from me remove all earthly dread,
And in most soothing ways my senses chide
That I hold counsel with the living dead

XII

I look around to see whose is the voice
Whose cadence falls so sweetly on my ear
As thus to make my hating heart rejoice,
But vain my quest, no living soul is near.

XIII

A spirit voice, I know, it needs must be
That sounds upon the air with silvr'y tone,
And yet, withal, no fears arise in me,
Though midst the ruins here I am alone.

XIV

The voice now cautions me to listen well,
And in harmonious tones with lightning speed
This story he narrates for me to tell,
And thus I write it down that all may read.

XV

"That fatal morn, when Richmond felt secure,
With many more I ran to yonder hill
To watch the burning ship, all feeling sure
That nothing round could do us harm or ill.

XVI

"And why should aught around fill us with fears?
Did we not know: 'The flag that braved the
breeze
On land and sea' for full one thousand years,
Flew o'er our city still and o'er our seas?"

XVII

"The scene was bright and beautiful and grand,
With florid streamers shooting far on high,
And none who viewed the scene from sea or land
Were cognizant they were so soon to die.

XVIII

"Whose was the fault is not for me to tell.—
The Judge of All shall surely justice mete
To those who prematurely rang our knell
When they are come to His just judgment seat

XIX

"You wonder why I wander 'neath the vault
Of heaven here and fain would ask—
'Tis but to beg forgiveness of a fault
And do again another ill-done task.

XX

"Though young in life, in wisdom now I'm old,
For I've passed through the chast'ning purge of
fire,
My harp, though silver now, will soon be gold,
When time has passed and I have mounted higher

XXI

"Along the path with slow increasing pace
Into the realms of peace where all is light;
'Till I have reached my time allotted seat,
There to enjoy the beatific sight

XXII

"Of God for aye and His hosannas sing,
Amidst the saints of His twice chosen few,
Before the treble throne of God, our King,
The vision of Whose glory's ever new.

XXIII

'The path is long, yet shorter may be made
By alms and prayers and other deeds of worth;
The happy day may too long be delayed
By thoughtless unforgiving hearts on earth.

XXIV

"Then do good deeds while in the flesh, my friend
And trespassers forgive, lest you forget
Such charity, till you have reached the end
Of life with some one unforgiven yet.

XXV

"Take heed that you will e'er remember this,
Lest you, as others did so oft before,
May cross that cold and ever dark abyss
Which separates earth from the spirit shore

XXVI

"Which lieth far beyond the farthest sun,
And trembling stand before high Heaven's court
With unforgiven fault and task undone;
No camouflage to which you can resort.

XXVII

"Be ye a man of lore, unlearned or youth,
Will there, as on earth, avail you naught;
Nor will forensic speech conceal the truth
In your account of deed and word and thought.

XXVIII

"In stilly night I've often wandered here
Far from those realms beyond the starry sky,
O'er that long way, so lonely, dark and drear,
But now the hour of bliss for me draws nigh.

XXIX

"For soon the pearly gates, which now bar me
Through which the sainted souls have ever trod
Will open wide and I shall ever see
The pristine glory of the throne of God."